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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000427

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SA](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDI KING SAYS TALKS WITH IRANIAN FM "HEATED"

Classified By: Political Counselor Lisa M. Carle,
Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. KEY POINTS:

--(U) Paying a back-handed compliment to Saudi efforts to rebuild Arab unity, Iranian FM Manouchehr Mottaki made a surprise visit to Riyadh March 15 in a bid to defuse tensions between the two countries.

--(S) King Abdallah told visiting White House Counterterrorism Adviser John Brennan he was having none of it; the meeting with Mottaki was a "heated exchange" over Iranian meddling in Arab affairs.

--(S) The King claimed he told Mottaki that Iran had a year to improve relations.

--(U) FM Saud Al-Faisal was publicly critical in a press conference following Mottaki's departure, saying that while Iranian support for Arab causes was appreciated, their support had to complement Arab "legitimacy" and not try to supplant it.

--(U) Post will provide a comprehensive report on Brennan's meeting with King Abdallah septel.

IRANIANS WORRIED BY ARAB RECONCILIATION TALKS?

12. (U) Iranian FM Manouchehr Mottaki paid a surprise visit to Riyadh March 15 bearing a letter from President Ahmadinejad to King Abdallah, which FM Saud Al-Faisal described as concerning relations between the two countries and the situations in the Arab Gulf and the Middle East. Mottaki was received by FM Saud before his audience with the King, and then reportedly headed to Bahrain and Kuwait.

13. (U) According to Iranian press reports, Mottaki described his visit as "the first round" of talks to pave the way for improved relations "to favor stability, peace, unity and the world of Islam." Mottaki was quoted as saying that "the time is now ripe for coordination and deliberation for Palestine's political victory."

KING ABDALLAH'S READOUT: A HEATED EXCHANGE

14. (S) THEY'RE PERSIANS FIRST, MUSLIMS SECOND: Responding to White House Counterterrorism Advisor John Brennan's query about Mottaki's visit, the King pointed out that Mottaki had been "sitting in that same seat (as Brennan) a few moments ago." Mottaki came to discuss "friendship," to which the King said he replied "it is not acceptable for friends to say one thing and do another." The King described his conversation with FM Mottaki as "a heated exchange, frankly discussing Iran's interference in Arab affairs." When challenged by the King on Iranian meddling in Hamas affairs, Mottaki apparently protested that "These are Muslims." "No, Arabs" countered the King, "You as Persians have no business meddling in Arab matters."

15. (S) AN ULTIMATUM? Mottaki tendered an invitation to visit Iran, but Abdallah said he replied that "All I want is for you to spare us your evil." Abdallah said the Iranians wanted to improve relations and that he responded by giving Mottaki an ultimatum. "I will give you one year" (to improve ties), "after that, it will be the end."

16. (S) PERSIAN PERFDY: Abdallah asserted that Iran is trying to set up Hizballah-like organizations in African countries, observing that the Iranians don't think they are doing anything wrong and don't recognize their mistakes. "I said (to Mottaki) that's your problem," recounted the King. He said he would favor Rafsanjani in an election, were he to run. He described Iran "not as a neighbor one wants to see, but as a neighbor one wants to avoid." He said the Iranians "launch missiles with the hope of putting fear in people and the world." A solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict would be a great achievement, the King said, but Iran would find other ways to cause trouble. "Iran's goal is to cause problems," he added. "There is no doubt something unstable about them." he continued. He described Iran as "adventurous in the negative sense" and declared, "may God prevent us from falling victim to their evil." Summarizing his history with Iran, Abdallah concluded: "The bottom line is that they cannot be trusted."

17. (S) PERSIAN MEDDLING: In an earlier meeting with Brennan (septel), Saudi Intelligence Chief Prince Muqrin bin Abdalaziz described Iran as "all over the place now." The Shiite crescent is becoming a full moon, encompassing Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait and Yemen among Iran's targets. In the Kingdom, he said "we have problems in Medina

RIYADH 00000427 002 OF 002

and Eastern Province." When asked if he saw Iran's hand in last month's Medina riots, he strongly affirmed his belief that they were "definitely" Iranian-supported. Muqrin bluntly stated "Iran is becoming a pain in the..." and he expressed hope that President Obama "can get them straight, or straighten them out."

FM SAUD'S OFFICIAL STATEMENT: THANKS, BUT NO THANKS

18. (U) A PUBLIC WARNING: FM Saud Al-Faisal held a press conference at Riyadh Airbase after Mottaki's departure. While describing the talks as "frank and transparent," the Prince was openly critical, saying: "Although we appreciate the Iranian support for Arab causes, we believe that this support should be channeled through Arab legitimacy, be consistent with its goals and positions, express its support for it and not be a replacement for it." Saud added that "at the same time, we believe that the unity of Arab and Palestinian ranks will help achieve these objectives." Questioned about leaks indicating that Saudi Arabia would reduce its representation at the Doha Summit if Iran was invited, Prince Saud replied, "this matter is incorrect."

19. (U) ARAB UNITY IS THE ANTIDOTE: Before commenting on Mottaki's visit, FM Saud issued a statement on the Arab Quartet Summit held in Riyadh on March 11. Describing the meeting as an "icebreaker," he expressed the SAG's pleasure with the outcome, and emphasized that the four leaders agreed there was a need for Arab unity to counter the challenges facing the region.

10. (U) This message was cleared by Assistant to the President John Brennan.

FRAKER